

STATINTL

Robert S. Allen - Paul Scott Report

US, Russia May Exchange Spies

WASHINGTON — Russia may have the chance to exchange its convicted spy, Colonel Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, for pilot Francis Powers.

The National Security Council, top policy-making agency over which President Eisenhower presides personally, has authorized the "initiating of preliminary overtures" through diplomatic channels to explore this possibility.

Immediate purpose of these inquiries is to ascertain whether the Soviet would consider releasing Powers, and on what terms.

This action was taken by the Security Council following extensive discussion of the matter at a State Department meeting attended by officials of the Justice Department and Central Intelligence Agency.

THE IDEA OF a Powers-Abel swap originated in the State Department. Basis for the proposal was a Russian feeler last September about securing Abel's release.

The State Department was sounded out on this by the ambassador of a European satellite. While carefully discreet and proper, he left no doubt he was speaking at the instigation of the Kremlin.

This undercover move got nowhere. At that time, Abel's appeal as a convicted foreign spy was pending before the Supreme Court. State Department officials pointed out to the Iron Curtain diplomat that until the Court disposed of the case, the government could do nothing even if it wanted to, which it emphatically did not.

Now the situation is very different, and in State Department quarters it is deemed possible the Soviet's circuitous effort nine months ago in Abel's behalf may be the opening to aid Powers.

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER may have the opportunity to do something about it himself. That's what Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson cabled from Moscow before the President departed for the summit conference.

Thompson reported the Foreign Office had informed him that Premier Khrushchev is personally handling Powers' case, and intends to discuss it with the President in Paris.

Abel was convicted for espionage in 1957, and sentenced to 30 years. He is now at the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. He will be eligible for parole in April 1968, but could be released by presidential order.